

John Shearman's Guide to Raphael

At the end of 2003, John Shearman's long awaited edition of the sources relating to Raphael's œuvre (1483-1520) finally appeared in print. The English scholar, who was one of the outstanding Raphael experts in the field of historical research, taught at Harvard and died in August 2003 as Professor Emeritus. As a specialist particularly in Renaissance art, he was active as both a teacher and researcher. His publishing career began as early as 1965 and included magisterial works such as the catalogue of Raphael's cartoons and tapestries for the Sistine Chapel (London 1972).

Until now, Raphael scholars depended for their studies on the collection of source material compiled by Vincenzo Golzio (Città del Vaticano 1936), which already ran to 378 pages, and to which Shearman felt deeply indebted; in his introduction he calls it one of the most useful books ever written. At the same time, the weaknesses of Golzio's edition were well known, in that many of the documents are only given in excerpts, for instance, and that sources discovered during the last decades naturally are not included. Shearman mentions that already in the 1960s he began to collect addenda and corrigenda unsystematically, but later decided on a completely new publication. This project was made public during the Raphael Year 1983, and Ludwig Frommel and Matthias Winner, the directors of the Bibliotheca Hertziana, the history of art's equivalent of the Princeton Institute for Advanced Study in regard to the history of art, promised to support of the ambitious enterprise. They thus honoured the name and obligation of the Bibliotheca Hertziana as a research centre for art historical studies with an international scope. That it still took twenty years before the work was published is partly due to the fact that this new collection of source material included each and every known reference to Raphael, his family, his possessions and his works. Furthermore, he checked almost each of the approximately 1.100 texts, whether documents or printed sources, literally scattered all over the world, against the original or standard early editions, even though they were simply treated as items, without discussing their material worth. The major reason for the long gestation period was the author's gruelling scholarly regimen, as he never employed research assistants and himself performed also seemingly secondary work.

In limiting the period covered to the years from 1483 to *ca.* 1600, Shearman followed Golzio, although he does not comment on this decision. It must be said that extending the range to include the later centuries would have been simply unmanageable unless one would have abandoned the aim of providing each document with a full bibliography. That this publication is much more massive than Vincenzo Golzio's, is not so much due to the fact that in the meantime a large amount of new documents and sources have been unearthed, however, but rather to a changed concept of the nature of scholarship. Shearman presents not only every document and source in a carefully checked editorial form, but also supplies for each entry – except those from Vasari's *Life of Raphael* – with an exhaustive bibliography which occasionally runs to over two hundred references. More significant than the sheer number of bibliographical items are, however, Shearman's commentaries to the entries. Here he demonstrates his familiarity with historical circumstances, often clarifying the relevance and substance of the source and providing an illuminating summary of its scholarly history.

The introductory essay about the character and the handling of historical documents is remarkable and should be of interest to anyone concerned with historical questions. Thus with regard to documents he believes to be wrongly evaluated, for instance, he discusses the 'inventions' of authors like Count Carlo Cesare Malvasia, a local historian in Bologna. In another example he looks at the activities of a nineteenth-century Roman workshop specialising in forgeries, which met the demand for autograph documents from famous people with great success, as we now know from recent archival research. More important than such details is Shearman's plea against a precipitate trust in allegedly well-established traditions and in favour of a carefully considered use of historical documents. He aptly compares the meticulous

study of such documents with the work of archaeologists: The time of single spectacular discoveries being past, we now need to reconstruct the connections and create a map of possible relationships in order to understand the significance of our data. To give an example: The correspondence between Duke Alfonso d'Este and his emissaries in Rome began already in 1514 but is documented extensively only from March 1517 onward – many of the relevant documents were discovered only during the last two decades. The correspondence covering the last four years of Raphael's life is particularly informative about Duke Alfonso's attempts to acquire a painting by the artist for his *camerino*. The Duke tried everything possible to reach his goal through his intermediaries, and finally complained bitterly that the treatment he received was an offence against his ducal eminence. Raphael, on the other hand, tried to escape his commitments by presenting the duke with two cartoons made for a different commission, repeatedly putting forward his duties to Pope Leo X, and on occasion even closed his door on the duke's emissaries. It is really only the wealth of documentation which enables us to get an intimate view of the relationship between the artist and his client, by the way also revealing the liberties an artist of Raphael's rank could take.

In his approach to documents, Shearman moreover adopts an up-to-date position in that he allows original sources their own historical context, on the basis of which he evaluates their substance, while also taking into account their contradictions. Relating to this subject, he mentions the exemplary case of the interesting letter of 16 August 1511 from the envoy Gian Francesco Grossi to Isabella d'Este in Mantua. He first informs her that the pope unveiled Raphael's painting of the ceiling in the Sistine Chapel to great applause. Because of Grossi's glaring mistake in giving it to Raphael instead of Michelangelo, this passage from the letter is almost never quoted in the literature devoted to Raphael. In the second part of his letter, Grossi remarks that he had heard that the pope was keen to have a portrait of the young Federico Gonzaga, a hostage at the papal court, in one of the rooms to be painted (i.e. the *Stanza della Segnatura* or the *Stanza dell'Eliodoro*). The note prompted art historians to try to identify the figures in the frescoes in both places without considering that Grossi speaks only of intention, not actual execution. This is a poignant example which shows that only the careful reading of a document can establish it as an item acceptable for scholarly use – which in this case means, for instance, an awareness that even eye-witnesses may err and that intentions are not to be taken as deeds. Shearman also emphasises that documents become historical evidence mainly by circumstance rather than by design, as they were originally produced for completely different purposes.

Elsewhere under the heading 'Resistance to Documents', the author discusses another remarkable case. Although the early Raphael biographer Luigi Pungileoni had published the date of death of Raphael's father Giovanni Santi (1 August 1494) already in 1822, yet the famous letter from Giovanna Feltria della Rovere to the *gonfaloniere della giustizia* Pier Soderini in Florence continued to be quoted as an important source for Raphael's early life. In this letter of 1504, the Duchess recommended the young artist to the Florentine head of state and in passing mentioned his father as still alive (*il padre so, che è molto virtuoso* [and his father, who is very virtuous]). The authenticity of this letter was rarely debated by scholars, but the real problem is the fact that the document, published by Giovanni Gaetano Bottari in 1754, has been lost since the mid-nineteenth century. Now Shearman puts forward the very subtle argument that the letter must be a forgery, either by Bottari himself or planted on him, to illustrate the career of the young artist. Such a ploy would not have been unique and indeed goes back to the beginnings of art-historical writing, where historical facts and literary inventions became entwined to a degree that often makes them difficult to disentangle – Vasari's *Lives* being an excellent example. In the present case it remains problematic to give a final verdict on the letter, as its content itself is so unusual. It finally comes down to a single word, *è* (is), which on the one hand led to the rejection of the document, but by the supporters of its authenticity is regarded as simply a slip of the pen. Shearman's condemnation *in absentia* is

questionable, and it is likely that this letter is not going to be laid to rest soon, even though it will be treated with greater circumspection.

In the nature of things, Shearman's views will not be shared by everybody, and even he makes mistakes, but this does not detract from the value of the enterprise. It is already obvious that his work will be indispensable for all Raphael scholars to come. The many recently discovered sources, which do not appear in Golzio's collection, provide a differentiated image of the artist, although they do not change it profoundly. It is in particular the author's learned commentary that offers many new or re-discovered insights and contributes greatly towards a sharper definition of the artist's profile. Likewise, Shearman's decision to arrange all sources and documents strictly chronologically and ignore the kind of systematic approach Golzio attempted, guarantees easier access, all the more since several indices and a concordance to Golzio's volume act as keys to the whole material. Furthermore, texts with several traditions are reproduced in their different versions, and important documents in Latin or Greek have been translated into English, a decision that both fulfils the demands of philological correctness and makes for easier use.

Scholarly works like this collection of sources by John Shearman belong to a type of basic research that today is rarely undertaken and indeed is difficult to undertake at all. In this case it was in particular the support of the Bibliotheca Hertziana, which with Julian Kliemann took editorial and scholarly charge of the project from 1994 onwards, and thus guaranteed a publication that does justice to the project. This resulted in the most comprehensive collection of source material ever published by the Bibliotheca Hertziana.

John Shearman. Raphael in Early Modern Sources 1483-1602. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003. 1.706 pp., 37 ills., £ 80.00 (\$ 125.00). ISBN 0-300-09918-5.

This review was agreed with the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung and submitted in February 2003. Since the 'Frankfurter' so far has failed to publish it, I have now decided to put it on the internet.

Jürg Meyer zur Capellen